

# Retraining program pays off at Demmer

## State program aids local manufacturer

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**Lansing State Journal file photo**

**At Demmer: An employee welds at Demmer Corp. in this file photo. The company has added 530 workers in 14 months.**

Julie Mann says Demmer Corp. could have found enough people when it went on a hiring binge. But they might not have been ready to go to work. The problem: they didn't have the right skills.

So, the company teamed up with Lansing Community College and Capital Area Michigan Works to train the people it needed to do its fabricating and machining work.

The joint effort was part of Michigan's No Worker Left Behind retraining program championed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm. The result: Demmer has hired 530 workers during the last 14 months - all with the skills needed for their new jobs.

"We could have found the people, but they wouldn't have had the skills," said Mann, Demmer's human resources director. "They wouldn't have hit the ground floor running."

In all, Demmer has added 1,000 employees, bringing its staff to about 1,300.

Granholm's office has honored Demmer and LCC for their success, marking the one-year anniversary of the No Worker Left Behind initiative.

The program aims to train 100,000 people in three years for high-demand and emerging occupations. It provides up to two years of free tuition at any Michigan community college, university or for other approved training programs.

## **31,000 participants**

About 31,000 people have gone through the program or are participating in it, said Liza Estlund Olson, director of the Department of Labor and Economic Growth's bureau of work force transformation. About 11,000 have completed training.

Westphalia resident Donald English got a welding job at Demmer in November 2007, two months after losing his job at Federal-Mogul Corp.'s plant in St. Johns when the Southfield-based auto supplier cut its operations there.

English, 43, first took part in Capital Area Michigan Works workshops, learning about career and life planning, interviewing, preparing a resume and job searching.

After the work force development agency helped him land the Demmer job, English trained with LCC through No Worker Left Behind.

"I took advantage of the whole system," he said. "It was a pretty smooth transition. Had I not had that support, I know I couldn't have done it nearly as smooth as it went."

## **Diverse training**

The initiative trains people in fields ranging from heavy equipment operation and truck driving to alternative energy and automotive technology, said Deborah Cole, interim dean of LCC's technical careers division.

"The good thing about manufacturing is the skill sets can be transferred," she said.

Doug Stites, president and chief executive officer of Capital Area Michigan Works, said training is the key to matching displaced workers with unfilled jobs in the Lansing area.

"We've got great companies who are hiring and we've got people out here who want to go to work," he said. "It's really about taking that person and giving them the skills the employer requires."

"It's no longer simply adequate to say, 'I want to work, I can show up on time.' They aren't going to hire just nice people. We've got to focus on the skills."

## **Learning key**

It's important for people to realize that lifelong learning is important to success in the job market, Olson said.

"This is a lifelong process. It isn't 'get in, get out,' " she said.

"You might need more training. You have to be willing to do that, to keep your job, to keep up with what's going on in the economy."

Mann said she did not know how many more workers Demmer would hire. She declined to discuss wages, but Stites said similar manufacturing jobs range from about \$10 an hour to \$12 an hour.